

~~TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE~~

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TS 204127

13 July 1973

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Proficiency of Egyptian Air Force and  
Air Defense Personnel

1. The massive influx of Soviet equipment and Soviet training programs since 1970 have provided Egypt with a large air force and air defense system. Some Egyptian units have demonstrated a high degree of proficiency.

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2. Assessment of the performance of the Soviet equipment provided to Egypt is not nearly so difficult as judging the quality of the men who operate that equipment. The Egyptians have shown competence in operating some of the most modern Soviet aircraft and equipment, but for the most part they have done so in circumstances that have been essentially unhampered by enemy forces. How well the Egyptians would do in combat with the Israelis simply cannot be judged confidently from the evidence available. We are able to detect what the Egyptians are using and how frequently they exercise, but are seldom able to discern how well they are doing or by what standards.

3. We are reasonably confident of certain basic assessments, however.

--the Egyptian air force and air defenses have expanded considerably in terms of men, equipment, and capabilities since the 1967 war.

--the USSR was almost totally responsible for the Egyptian buildup up to July 1972, when the Soviets withdrew from Egypt.

--the current Soviet contribution is at a much lower rate, and thus the Egyptians will not be able to expand their force significantly in the future unless that aid resumes.

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The Soviet Contribution

4. Egypt's air force and air defense personnel are the best of the Arab nations primarily because of the extensive training programs conducted by the Soviets in Egypt and the USSR. Since the Soviet exodus in July 1972, the Egyptians have assumed responsibility for their own training, including that conducted by operational units.

5. Soviet presence in Egyptian training and operational units was pervasive from 1970 to mid-1972. Over 1,000 Soviets were involved in a training or advisory capacity to air force and air defense units. (Some of the 6,000 Soviets in Soviet air defense units based in Egypt also provided on-the-job training to Egyptians.) Soviet advisors were present in virtually every echelon of the Egyptian military, including Soviet general officers in Air Defense Headquarters. Some 400 Soviet instructors taught at Egyptian SAM and AAA training centers. Soviet advisors also were assigned to combat units. For example, two Soviets were assigned to each Egyptian SA-2 battalion and some 20 Soviet pilots assisted two Egyptian MIG-21 brigades. Generally, Soviet training programs in the USSR and Egypt were extensive, intensive, and practical.

6. The net result of the Soviet effort was to improve the quality of the Egyptian pilots considerably since 1970.

--In the year preceding the 1970 ceasefire and before the massive Soviet effort to improve air defenses, the Egyptians lost 30 aircraft for every Israeli aircraft destroyed in aerial combat. Given the current magnitude and quality of all Egyptian air defenses, it is doubtful the Israelis could duplicate that ratio today.

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7. The departure of the Soviets with their relatively disciplined training has had an adverse effect on Egyptian capabilities, but that effect is difficult to quantify. The few hundred Soviets remaining and the large number of trained Egyptians will permit the air force to retain its competence for some time, however.

8. Two examples of decreases in Egyptian capability have been noted since mid-1972. First, a Soviet team in Egypt indicated in February 1973 that equipment was deteriorating because of poor maintenance. Second, the number of SU-7 and SU-17 training sorties has decreased by 60 percent. No new pilots are being trained for these aircraft, suggesting that the Egyptians may have decided not to use the 120 aircraft of these types in their inventory.

#### Pilot Training

9. Unlike US pilots, Egyptian pilots receive little combat training in their formal flight schools. Combat training generally is the responsibility of the operational unit, and the proficiency of the individual

pilot depends on the amount and type of training in his unit. Data on that training are limited, and assessments necessarily are based on extrapolation from a few units.

10. Most of Egypt's fighters are MIG-21s. In one MIG-21 brigade, pilots fly an average of 12 to 15 hours a month, a rate comparable to that of Soviet pilots. This is less than half the 30 hours a month flight time logged by [REDACTED]

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US fighter pilots.

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11. The type of training conducted and the proficiency levels achieved vary from unit to unit, but only a small portion of flight time is dedicated to realistic aerial combat. The most frequently observed exercises are simulated intercepts of small flights of Israeli aircraft at medium and low altitudes.

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[REDACTED] Air defense exercises involving a coordinated response by all elements of the force, including SAMs, fighters and AAA units, generally are held twice a year.

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12. Increased training over the last year has improved the capabilities of Egypt's MIG-21 pilots in ground attack. Some of these pilots have demonstrated a high level of proficiency in toss-bombing and low level attacks. This new emphasis on ground attack by MIG-21s probably was precipitated by the decrease in SU-7 and SU-17 training.

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#### Problems in the Air Force

14. Despite the Soviet assistance, the air force still has significant shortcomings:

--Many of Egypt's 480 combat pilots are young officers trained since 1967 and lack combat experience.

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--There is a shortage of experienced unit commanders.

--The ratio of pilots to operational combat aircraft is only 1.3 to 1, [REDACTED]

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--Although the Soviets provided some of their later model fighters, structural defects and poor Egyptian maintenance have cut aircraft in-commission rates to 50 percent in some units and caused a large number of accidents.

#### SAM Crew Proficiency

15. Little evidence is available on the current proficiency of SAM crews. Prior to the Soviet withdrawal, Egyptians were sent to SAM schools in the Soviet Union and on their return were assigned to Soviet units based in Egypt. The Egyptians received three months of on-the-job training from the Soviet crews before they assumed responsibility for the sites. Air defense exercises integrating SAM units with other elements of the force are held regularly. However, a Soviet team sent to Egypt earlier this year reported that the equipment was deteriorating because of poor maintenance by the Egyptians. The launch crews for the sites probably are losing their proficiency as well. This was demonstrated late last month when the Egyptians fired at a flight of Israeli aircraft and failed to achieve any hits.